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Mr Stuart Mallott
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Dear Mr Mallott

Short inspection of Northborough Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has restored and is improving upon the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Parents commented, 'The school is small, personal and friendly and it has embraced [children's] individual differences,' and, 'Northborough is a happy school that my children actively enjoy attending.' These views reflect those of the overwhelming majority of parents who agree their children are safe, happy and taught well at Northborough. You and your staff have successfully ensured that the school has retained the positive, caring ethos noted at the time of the previous inspection.

The overwhelming majority of pupils are polite, courteous and want to do well. In lessons they are keen to learn and are supportive of each other as they attempt the increasingly challenging and varied learning activities. Pupils display similar enthusiasm in their play. They make energetic use of the wide range of activities, such as the outside fitness area, at break time and lunchtime. The very small number of pupils who find making the correct behaviour choices difficult are supported through your 'pyramids of support' and are increasingly well behaved. However, you rightly continue to closely monitor these pupils' behaviour to ensure that the rate at which their behaviour improves accelerates.

Leaders have ensured that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be provided for well. The bright displays of pupils' recent work are representative of the opportunities they have to explore interesting topics about

artists, British values, friendship, design, history and science. Pupils enjoy and, importantly, understand why it is necessary to be studying such a breadth of topics, faiths and cultures. Pupils told me how school is helping them 'grow up knowing there is diversity all around us', and that 'we know to respect everyone, not just one faith'. Pupils are typically reflective and understanding of each other's opinions and differences.

On taking up your post in September 2015, you judged that pupil achievement was not as high as it should be. You and your senior team set about the task of improving the quality of education with great energy. You and your leaders have set out the high standards you expect, and support and challenge adults to achieve them. Teachers and teaching assistants told me they are more clearly accountable for the quality of their work, as senior leaders make 'good educational changes'. Staff I spoke with explained that the pace of change is rapid and is leading to improvements. The large majority of staff who responded to the online survey agreed they enjoy and are proud to work at the school. A small number expressed sentiments that indicate they are unsettled by the scale of the changes that have taken place. Leaders, including governors, acknowledge that now there needs to be consolidation of the good work carried out so far and an evaluation of what is working well and what is not.

The impact of leaders' work is evident in the good and improving pupil achievement and their above-average attendance. For example, achievement in the early years has risen. There have been improvements elsewhere too. In 2016, by the end of key stage 1, higher proportions of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics than was nationally the case. As well as maintaining these standards in 2017, the proportions achieving greater depth in each subject increased and were also above national averages. In key stage 2, pupils' progress in mathematics, an area for improvement from the previous inspection, has improved, is in line with the progress made by pupils nationally and continues to accelerate. Pupils' achievement in reading by the end of key stage 2 improved in 2017 and was in the top 30% of schools nationally. Pupils achieved in line with their peers nationally in writing in 2016. However, writing performance fell back in 2017 and has rightly been a priority for the school.

Governors support and challenge you and your leaders well. They strike an appropriate balance between strategic leadership and operational awareness. Their regular visits to school are focused on checking the quality of areas such as safeguarding and provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Findings from these visits are carefully recorded and followed up on. Governors perform their statutory duties effectively.

As you have overseen a period of considerable change, you have endeavoured to keep the school community well informed of the work taking place. This is working very well in the early years through regular communication such as the weekly 'family Friday' sessions and phonic workshops. Several parents told me how the school keeps them well informed and how effectively issues or concerns are dealt with at the school. However, a small number of parents would welcome faster

responses to their queries about their children's education and changes that occur in school. You place a high priority on communication and acknowledge this is an aspect of your work that could be improved further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that the school meets its statutory duty to keep children safe. Staff explained to me that you have reviewed and improved further the safeguarding processes in the school. Inspection evidence supports their views. You seek and act upon external advice to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding policy and practice reflect the latest guidance. Consequently records, including that of the checks on adults who work at the school, are accurate and appropriately updated.

Staff are suitably informed about, and aware of, their duties with regards to safeguarding pupils. You make sure staff receive updates when required. Adults understand the importance of noticing 'each little piece of the jigsaw' that may indicate a child is at risk. Staff report any concerns they have and leaders keep well-organised school records that confirm the careful consideration they give to each concern that is brought to their attention. Leaders take timely action to ensure that pupils and families receive the right support when it is needed.

Pupils I spoke with explained that Northborough Primary School is one in which they feel safe and happy in their learning. All staff and an overwhelming majority of parents agree children are safe at Northborough Primary School. Leaders have also ensured that pupils have age-appropriate knowledge of how to keep safe in a range of settings, including online. Pupils told me why it was important to inform an adult if they had any concern.

Pupils know what behaviour constitutes bullying. They understand the different forms bullying can take and the hurt that it can cause. Pupils told me that bullying was not a frequent occurrence at their school and expressed confidence that adults would deal with any incidents well.

Inspection findings

- The proportions of children achieving a good level of development in each of the previous three years has been in line with or just above national expectations. My first line of enquiry was to establish if this represents good progress for children in the early years.
- Parents are warm in their praise of the quality of provision in the early years. Inspection evidence indicates their confidence is not misplaced. Children thrive in the well-organised, bright learning environment because there is strong teaching and good-quality care. Adults accurately establish each child's capabilities and adapt learning activities carefully to ensure that children are able to make at least good progress.
- Adults have successfully created a culture in which children learn to share, enjoy each other's company and celebrate one another's achievements. Children who

are in need of it are provided with well-judged additional support. As a result, they make rapid gains in their confidence in preparing for and taking part in learning activities.

- Evidence from observations and children's work demonstrates they make good progress from their individual, and widely varying, starting points. In 2017, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development was above the national average. Consequently, children are well prepared for Year 1.
- In 2017, pupils' progress in writing by the end of key stage 2, while broadly in line with their peers nationally, was considerably lower than in 2016. Therefore, my second line of enquiry was to establish the progress key stage 2 pupils make in their writing.
- Leaders quickly pinpointed the reasons why pupils, in particular middle-ability pupils, did not achieve as well as they should have. Literacy leaders took swift and effective action to improve how writing is taught. They provided training to ensure that teachers have a deeper understanding of what constitutes high-quality writing in each key stage. Teachers are better equipped with the skills and knowledge to plan activities that enable pupils to develop their literacy skills.
- Current pupils are making good and sometimes better progress in writing because teachers are successfully implementing their improved strategies. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to frequently establish what pupils can and cannot do in their writing and set them precise individual targets. Teachers show pupils best practice in writing, through the school's 'what a good one looks like' approach. Pupils respond well, confidently drafting, editing and finalising well-constructed creative, descriptive and non-fiction writing. In a small number of classes, teachers are not as skilled at moving pupils in a timely way to enable them to achieve the higher standards of which they are capable.
- Pupils told me how much they enjoy writing from other people's perspective and developing characters. Their enjoyment is helping fuel the faster progress they are making. Pupils, including those who are most able, are making more rapid advances in their use of grammar and precision in spelling because teachers are routinely focusing on these aspects. However, some teachers do not have high enough expectations of how pupils should present their work.
- The progress pupils make in mathematics by the end of key stage 2 has improved over the previous two years and was in line with national expectations. My third line of enquiry was to determine whether this trajectory of improvement is being sustained. Numeracy leaders judged that teachers were not providing enough opportunities for pupils to develop reasoning and problem-solving skills. Leaders put in place appropriate training to address these gaps, and evidence demonstrates that this action continues to contribute to improving outcomes. Pupils enjoy learning and achieve well in mathematics lessons.
- Teachers are more accomplished in providing pupils with well-crafted sequences of activities that enable pupils to make more rapid gains in their learning. Pupils told me how the school's regular 'Norbert's number time' sessions help them develop their understanding of mathematics. Work seen in books demonstrates that pupils apply concepts they have learned well to solve increasingly complex

mathematical problems. Inspection evidence supports pupils' views that mathematics is 'more challenging' and 'takes us out of our comfort zone'. Pupils, including those who are most able, respond well and make good progress.

- My final line of enquiry was to ascertain if all groups of pupils attend school equally well. This was because, in previous years, small numbers of pupils were absent too frequently. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance carefully and take appropriate action where it starts to slip. They put in place precise support for pupils and, where needed, their families. As a consequence, in 2016/17, attendance for all groups of pupils was higher than the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they review and make appropriate amendments to the way leaders communicate with, and respond to, parents
- they precisely evaluate the impact of their actions and make sure the next steps in school improvement are communicated to all in the school community
- they equip teachers with the skills necessary to ensure that pupils make even more rapid progress and achieve the higher standards in aspects of their writing
- teachers reinforce consistently high expectations of how pupils should present their work.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Peterborough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I held discussions with you about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, leaders' evaluation of the quality of education, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' learning.
- I also met with other leaders, including subject leaders; teachers; teaching assistants; and the chair of governors together with two other governors. I held a meeting with a representative of the local authority.
- Documents such as: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan; leaders' assessment of pupils' progress; leaders' monitoring of pupil attendance and behaviour; pupil premium reports; and the school's safeguarding arrangements,

records, files and documentation were examined.

- Together with you, I visited classrooms to observe pupils learning. We also observed pupils working in small groups out of the classrooms. We looked at examples of children's and pupils' work to establish the progress they make.
- I spoke with a group of 11 pupils, and also with many others informally during lessons and break time, regarding their learning. I also considered the views of 51 pupils who responded to the online survey.
- I considered the views of parents I spoke with at the start of the school day, as well as those of the 74 parents who responded to Parent View. I spoke with one parent by phone and took into account the views expressed in one letter received on the day of inspection. The views of 20 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire were also taken into account, as well of those I spoke with around the school site.